David Cates, winner of the 2010 Artist's Innovation Award for Literary Arts

Artist Statement:
In my writing I have tried over and over again to answer the universal question of what it means to be a human being. Or if not to answer it, to at least participate in the conversation. Like all people, in all cultures, in all times, my characters try to find meaning and dignity when faced with their mortality and inevitable suffering. We do not all win the Super Bowl. We do all suffer and die. Since those are the only two guarantees we have, the universal questions facing all of us have always been, Why? and What for? How people answer those questions is what I am interested in as a writer.

The stories of our lives are driven by our illusions. I don't mean our delusions. I mean our often incorrect and semi-blind notions of who we think we are and what we think the world is like. We step out each day armed with our illusions, and our actions inevitably lead to the crash of these private illusions against unyielding reality. The result can be comedy (X Out of Wonderland) or tragedy, (Hunger in America) but how we respond to our broken illusions is how we grow, move, change. Finally, human beings are social animals. We live in groups in order to survive. So addition to our individual physical needs, we need each other. One of the things we've been given that allows us to live in groups is language. We use language to say what we need, what we want, to pass information, to ask questions. We use language to tell stories. We love stories because stories get us out of ourselves. We need stories because they ask us to climb inside the skin of another. For how can we feel compassion if we can't imagine the suffering of another? How can our groups hold together? And if they can't, how can we survive?
So for me writing stories is the most human of human work. I do it to help me understand mysteries like love, courage, right and wrong, good and evil, and the unpredictable growth and

development of individual characters. I do it because I don't know how to be human without thinking about these things, and the only way to think about them for me is through stories.

Regarding your work and artwork, describe the innovations you have made in your art and/or your process.

My sample includes sections of four finished novels. Each of the four takes a conventional form and bends it. In order to stay under 500 words, I'll write about just three. On the surface, "Hunger in America," is a realistic novel that takes place in real time, in a real place, Kodiak, Alaska. The novel is written in the present tense, but instead of moving simply from moment to moment, I crowd the narrative with characters' memories and anticipated futures—things hoped for, yearned for, pined for—and by doing so am able to represent the present as a place full of an almost unbearable dramatic tension. This book takes place in a frontier town at the end of the road, at the end of the continent, and so the narrative had to reflect a place crowded with oddly-turned memories and unrealistic dreams with no place left to go. This is an example of an innovative perspective. The second section is a short chapter from my second novel, "X Out of Wonderland," a satirical farce. The section I've included uses lists to evoke an unlimited market. The use of a finite list to evoke infinity is an example of an innovative technique. More importantly, because the protagonist "X" has such enduring hope, faith, and love, the story ultimately moves beyond a limited satirical take on an economic system to show a human being forced to make his way in an unfathomable world. This is the universal human predicament again. Simple faith, unfathomable world. The fourth section is the beginning of a recently completed novel called "Ben Armstrong's Strange Trip Home." The innovation springs from how into an archetypal Cain and Abel story are blended a lot of Native American myths, coyote stories, and faerie tales. Ben walks between the worlds of dream, memory, and history as easily as he walks between the farmhouse rooms. Yet each dramatic event rises naturally from the land itself, from the change of seasons, weather, light and landscape. Waking is the reoccurring motif. Ben wakes over and over again. He wakes to find his brother dead and turning into a fish. He wakes from dreams into dreams, wakes into the past and back into the present again. But Ben's last waking at the end of the story is different. The day is indeed new, as is Ben's consciousness. He no longer feels merely a vague dread, but happiness, too. And happiness despite an awareness in his bones that something terrible had happened, or was about to happen, or both. Although the house is built, and the cast of characters set (on this last day they include the living and the dead, of course) Ben gets out of bed pulled by a yearning and faith even bigger than his dread, and he opens the door on the blinding light of a new day. This is the act of a man who by now knows the infinite possibilities living holds, and gets up anyway.

Regarding your work and artwork, describe how the artwork samples you submitted illustrate the evolution of your work.

My sample includes the first sections of my four finished novels. The wide progression of genres are evidence of my evolution as a novelist. I don't know any other novelist who has written in

four such varying forms. The first section in the sample is the beginning chapter of my first book, "Hunger in America." The novel is a realistic, three-act tragedy and it takes place in real time—between 6 pm and 6 am, May 30 and 31, 1983—and in a real place, Kodiak, Alaska. I think the soul of a culture is exposed on its frontiers, and Kodiak in 1983 was a frontier town, populated by people from all over America, all of them looking for something, few of them finding it. The second section in the sample is two short chapters from my second novel, "X Out of Wonderland," a satirical farce. The story exaggerates reality in order to illuminate reality. It takes a commonly believed idea and carries it to its absurd extreme. In doing so, it satirizes not only the Global Free Market but any arbitrary system that we decide is the source of Providence and Justice. The third section is from my third novel, "Freeman Walker," a historical novel that takes the reader into a story that on the surface appears realistic, but by the end has broken out of that mold to evoke an American mythology. In the section I've submitted, a boy is forced to leave home. It is a classic beginning for a coming of age story. But in my novel the boy is a mulatto slave, who in being exiled is also, paradoxically, being freed. The appearance of his mother's ghost is a harbinger for the magic that will follow. "Freeman Walker," ultimately, is a creation myth for America. The fourth section is the beginning of a recently completed novel called "Ben Armstrong's Strange Trip Home," a story about a 50-year old man who comes home to the farm he left as a young man. "Ben Armstrong" is a story in which dream, memory and the history of the land are combined in a seamless narrative of the protagonist's homecoming. The narrative re-creates in prose the reality that our consciousness includes not only the physical world we move through, but our memories, dreams, and all else that has happened in that place before us. This novel is the the most original thing I have written. It creates a world in which the living, the dead, the remembered, and the dreamed all take up equal space.

Regarding public access to your work and artwork, describe a low-cost or no-cost activity to take place during the grant period that will convey your innovative work and artistry to other Montanans.

I have read all over the state for my first three books, and so will schedule more readings in the coming year. I can also lead one or two day writing workshops or give craft lectures. I can schedule these at libraries and at Universities and colleges.

Melissa Kwasny, winner of the 2010 Artist's Innovation Award for Literature

Artist Statement:
Most of my adult life has been devoted to the writing of poetry. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, I have built a life according to that necessity. I have published four books of poetry, two novels, and have edited two anthologies. I have taught poetry in the public schools, in colleges, and to teachers as an instructor in a graduate program. I believe in the Imaginary Life of the Interior and in protecting and promoting that life for others, especially in a time of increasing materialism and instrumentalism. All this is my contribution to the enterprise of poetry.

Regarding your work and artwork, describe the innovations you have made in your art and/or your process.
My third book of poetry, Reading Novalis in Montana was published in 2009. Novalis was one of the first Romantics, a German poet-philosopher in the late eighteenth century who believed in the doctrine of correspondences, that the natural world was symbolic of a divine realm and that the outer world was symbolic of a deeper interior. In my book, I am investigating those ideas through the lens of living in North America, particularly in the West, where the mystic tradition can be traced in the ceremony and song of the Native people and in my relationship with a land that has been, thus, ceremonialized. To have gathered from the air a live tradition, Ezra Pound wrote in his Cantos. In America, the live tradition I have been most struck by is less evident than the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome and China, which Pound was investigating, less the ruins and cathedrals of place than something caught on the twigs of aspen, buried under the stones of the creek.

All four of my books of poetry, including Thistle, and The Archival Birds, as well as the two novels, are explorations of and investigations into similar questions: How do we have a

relationship with the natural world in our time? What can we learn about being human from the non-human forms of life? What part does language play in this search and what part the various mythologies of both Western and Native cultures? My poems have always focused on the image, in particular the natural image, and my ability to render it has brought me increasingly closer to those forms of being other than the human, and, in turn, my poetic form has become looser and less conventional. In The Archival Birds, which contains a section of meditations on trees, as well as a crown of sonnets exploring the news that the songbird populations are diminishing, the form was formal and elegiac. In Thistle, each poem is a lyric meditation on a particular flower, herb or plant that grows in my yard or the near forests and fields where I live in Montana. Many of the poems, in addition to the concentrated attention paid to the plant in front of meits nature as it werealso reference the plants origins, uses, and names. In Reading Novalis in Montana, I wanted to expand that focus so that, although it was still steadied on the natural world, I also made room for my readings in poetry, philosophy, and history, and my encounters and conversations with people, especially those who are thinking about nature and our place in it. The Nine Senses is a collection of prose poems to be published in early 2011. The prose poem is a form I am still investigating for its potential to intensify my dialogue with the image and its central place in both poem and meditative practice.

Regarding your work and artwork, describe how the artwork samples you submitted illustrate the evolution of your work.

For over two years now, I have been visiting petroglyph and pictograph sites in Montana and the West, reading the anthropological research, and consulting with some of the widely published archaeologists in the region. This "rock art", painted and etched by people inside caves and rock shelters, on bluffs and cliffs anywhere from 18,000 to 500 years ago, is compelling to me, not only in its knowledge about the ceremonial relationship of early peoples to the earth but also in our imaginative relation to it. Recent books, such as David Lewis-William's The Mind in the Cave, James D. Keyser and Michael A. Klassen's Plains Indian Rock Art, and even poet Clayton Eshelman's Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld, affirm what I have only intuited or heard from tribal people in Montana, that most of the rock art in the traditions I am interested in (the Foothills Abstract, Columbia Plateau, and Ceremonial Traditions, circa 1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.) was made by shamans or initiates seeking vision, and that many of the images are "entropic" images made by the mind and its chemicals in a state of trance or dream. In short, I am surrounded, here in the mountains where I live, by a visionary record of the human interior, or as Eschleman says, "a mythic geography that constituted what some cultures have called the Underworld." The poems generated by this study are not narrative or discursive. They do not, in other words, explain the images. I use the prose poem form because I have found its deceptive similarity to narrative, with its emphasis on the sentence rather than the line, to allow me freedom to focus on the image—the rock art image as well as my internal response to it. As I write in one of the poems, “if we could draw what we are, draw

the inside out to be displayed," it might look something like the images I have been encountering.

What has also emerged out of the writing of these poems is another project: a collection of essays based on the idea of the image itself: how it is used in poetic practice, its various manifestations as metaphor, analogy, personification, and figure, and the different cultural and historical attitudes toward it. Gaston Bachelard, in his book The Poetics of Space, writes that a true image is one that, in order for it to speak to us, must engage our imagination and thus, allow us to "think and dream at the same time." It is not the image we "look at," which stays on the surface of the page or the wall or the mind, but the one that penetrates into our lives, reverberates like a voice in a cave, radiates out and into us. Working on these twin projects at the same time is new for me, combining both intuition (the poems) and academic study (the prose) toward a deeper, more holistic knowledge.

Regarding public access to your work and artwork, describe a low-cost or no-cost activity to take place during the grant period that will convey your innovative work and artistry to other Montanans.

In the spring of 2011, I will combine the essays and poems in a public reading/presentation that would also incorporate a slide show of pictographs and petroglyphs (without identifying the sites, given the aim of protecting them from vandalism). I will make this presentation in at least two venues, one in Helena and one in Missoula, preferably at the art museums or historical societies. I would also use this opportunity to speak of on-going efforts to preserve rock art sites in Montana and to educate people about their protection. To this end, I will also invite area archaeologists to participate.